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THE MERMAID:

A TALE.

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THE MERMAID:

A TALE.

By rugged Scarba's gloomy shore,
Where sombre rocks rise high and steep,
And where the billows' ceaseless roar
(The music of the mighty deep)

Is endless heard with murmurings hoarse,
And the dark circling waters flow
In rapid, wild, tempestuous course,
A thousand feet in depth below,

A gallant barque, with sails all spread,
And pennons flying from each mast,
Tossed wildly on her foamy bed,
And shivered in the rushing blast,

Like some frail reed by tempest bowed;
For o'er the land and o'er the sea
The storm was gathering fast and loud,
And raised its voice tempestuously;

And swift across the face of Heaven,
Rolling, and vast, and fierce, and far,
Rugged and black the clouds were driven,
Rattling like thunderbolts of war.

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A youth bent o'er the vessel's prow,
And ever gazed, with anxious eye,
Upon the foaming waves below,
And then upon the lowering sky;

And thought of her, his destined bride,
So soon his loving wife to be,
Dearer to him than aught beside,
His own, his beauteous Coralie.

And now from foreign wars returned,
And passed the perils of the deep,
The Chieftain with fond ardor burned
With her his cherished vow to keep.

"But is," thought he, "all danger past?"
For clouds portentous draped the sky,
And the fierce rushing of the blast
Proclaimed the coming tempest nigh.

"And if," he thought, "it be decreed
That our two loving souls must part,
Oh, God! console her in her need,
And soothe the anguish of her heart;

"But grant," he prayed, "that fate prove kind,
And not beneath the turbid wave
That this fond yearning heart shall find
An early and untimely grave."

With swelling sail and straining mast
The little barque sped swift along,
While mingled with the wailing blast,
The stormy petrel's plaintive song.

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And soon to that devoted band
That manned the barque, though bold and brave,
'Twas shown she could not long withstand
The fury of the wind and wave.

And now that heart, which ne'er had quailed
Mid war's alarms, grew weak with fear,
And those once blooming cheeks now paled
At thought of her than life more dear.

When, lo! to his bewildered eyes,
Half doubting if he saw aright,
A radiant form appeared to rise,
Fair as some fabled water-sprite.

Up through the waters it arose;
And now, her glowing charms displayed,
To his enravished gaze disclose
The ocean's child, the fond Mermaid.

And on the Chief she softly gazed;
On him her glance so sweetly fell,
That to her eyes his own were raised,
And there transfixed by beauty's spell.

Back o'er her shoulders her dark hair
In long, luxuriant tresses hung,
While from her lips stole forth an air
As sweet as siren ever sung.

"Oh, come with me to the pearly caves,
Where the waters are ever bright,
And the ocean's gems, through the crystal waves,
Glitter bright as the stars of night.

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"By day to thine unwearied gaze shall unfold
All the beauties of ocean surpassingly rare,
With its charms, and its secrets, and wonders untold,
With which there is naught upon earth can compare,

"And the treasured stores of the hidden deep,
The diamond clear, and the emerald green,
I will give unto thee forever to keep,
With rubies the brightest that ever were seen.

"By night thou shalt sleep in the coral caves,
Thy head soft pillowed on some fair breast,
While the low refrain of the murmuring waves
Shall soothe all thy senses to sweetest rest.

"And when thou art wrapt in the softest sleep,
Around thee shall gather the maids of the main,
And over thy slumbers their vigils shall keep,
The fairest of all the sister train.

"Or we'll glide o'er the waves, 'neath the starry night,
When the moon o'er the waters comes dancing,
Or bask in the beams, where her silvery light
In tremulous gleams is glancing.

"And I'll be thy faithful and own true love,
Never roving from thy dear side,
And the water sprite thou'lt find will prove
More constant than earthly bride.

"Then come with me to the pearly caves,
Where the waters are ever bright,
And the ocean's gems, through the crystal waves,
Glitter bright as the stars of night."

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"There is a maid more fair than thou,"
The Chief replied, "on Scotia's shore,
Who lovingly awaits me now,
And mourns I came not long before;

"And should I leave that peerless maid,
And thus to the undying love
Of her by my false faith betrayed,
Thus vilely, basely recreant prove,

"May I sink fathoms deep below,
Where never hope can reach me more;
Where torrents wild tempestuous flow,
And mighty billows rage and roar."

The Mermaid smiled: "Think not," she said,
"Thou canst escape the impending fate
Which now hangs lowering o'er thy head;
Yet pause before it be too late;

"In vain that maid looks forth for thee;
Vainly she scans the distant main;
For false her fondest hopes must be
Of him who ne'er shall come again.

"But promise thou wilt yet be mine,
And from thy fate, a watery grave,
I vow for thy sweet sake—yes, thine—
Thee and thy gallant barque to save.

"But slight the boon and scorn the love
The Mermaid fondly feels for thee,
There is no power below, above,
Shall save thee from the angry sea;

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"For insult given by mortal man
To us proud daughters of the sea,—
For that, to thee I swear, there can,
Save death, no expiation be."

"Though twice as fair," the Chief replied,
"Than thou art now, e'en couldst thou be,
I'd never quit my earthly bride
For maiden of the dark blue sea."

The Mermaid frowned: "'Tis well," she said,
(The tempest now burst loud above;)
"Fall the storm's wrath upon thy head:
Thus scorn's repaid by slighted love."

The billows wildly lash the barque,
And the last hope seems well nigh fled,
For all above, below, is dark,
Fierce, wild, tempestuous, and dread.

The Chieftain now cries out aloud,
Of Heaven above entreats relief;
With agony his soul is bowed
In wild despair and hopeless grief.

"Oh, Coralie! Oh, Coralie!"
In piteous tones aloud he cried;
"Lost, lost forever, unto me!
My own true love! my peerless bride!"

And now with one wild burning thought,
One only wish, one sole desire,
His soul with direst anguish fraught,
Did love for Coralie inspire.

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"Stay! stay!" he cried: "I swear to thee,
If thou this gallant barque wilt save,
Thine own true faithful love to be,—
Nay, more, thine abject, willing slave."

Again a smile full radiant played
Upon that face divinely sweet,
As the dear words the Chieftain said
Her fond, enravished heart did greet.

"Do thou thy pledge fulfill," she cried,
"And I my pledge to thee will keep;
Thine own true love, thine ocean bride,
Will sing the angry waves to sleep.

"Yet stay: some token I would have
From thee that thou 'lt not faithless prove,—
Some valued pledge of thee I crave,
To bind with firmest tie thy love."

"Here, take this ring,—a pledge that I
My plighted word will keep with thee:"
Thus with a deep and mournful sigh
He said, and flung it in the sea.

Slowly she sank; the waters close
O'er her fair head, while from the sea,
As from its very depths, there rose
A soul-entrancing melody,

As if a thousand voices there,
Blending in harmony sublime,
Were rising to the upper air,
At one accord with measured time.

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And, lo! before the soft refrain
The ocean smoothed its ruffled breast;
As if to list the 'witching strain,
The winds their angry roars suppressed.

The clouds dispersed; the thunder rolled
Fainter and fainter from afar;
And now their gladdened eyes behold
In the dusk sky the evening star;

While from the waters of the sea,
Shedding thereon her lustre bright,
Arose, in radiant majesty,
Dian, chaste Goddess of the Night.

In thanks each lifts his grateful voice;
Yet one alone, where all are glad,
Yes, one, 'midst those who now rejoice,
Alone is pensive, mute, and sad.

With heavy heart and mournful brow,
The Chieftain paced the vessel's side,
Thinking upon his fatal vow,
Faithless to her, his cherished bride.*

"But no," he cried, "'tis not to her
That I my plighted word should keep;
For God is our deliverer
From perils of the treacherous deep.

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* Though the Chieftain has repeatedly thought, and spoken of, Coralie as his bride, she was in fact only about to become such. For this error (which, however, he is not quite so sure may not be allowable as a poetical license) the author deems that he cannot do better by way of excuse than plead the distinguished precedent afforded by the illustrious author of the Bride of Abydos.

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"No, Coralie, my own sweet love,
Never to one so true as thou.
Will I so false, so faithless prove:
God will absolve me from the vow.

"To Him alone our gratitude
Is due, for he alone did save."
Thus thought the Chieftain to elude
Fulfillment of the pledge he gave.

Before the gently swelling gale
The little barque sped swiftly on,
And should a favoring breeze prevail,
They 'll reach the shore ere night is gone.

Yes, with the early morning's sun,
Each one of that brave warrior band,
Shall gaze with joyful eyes upon
The mountains of his native land.

Blow soft and fair, thou evening breeze,
And gently swell the grateful sails;
Waft the barque onward o'er the seas,
Till night is gone and day prevails.

Then, when the first blush of the morn
Shall tinge the sombre clouds of night,
And their dark shadowy forms adorn
With purple and with crimson bright,

Soft maids shall gather on the strand,
To welcome the returning brave
Back to their own, their native land,—
That glorious land of old which gave

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So many heroes to the strife
  On distant Norway's barren plains:
Thoughtless of self, of home, of life,
  Is he who Scotland's cause maintains.

Then praise be to those chiefs of old,
  Each valiant, brave, and honored name;
Long shall their deeds of might be told,
  Their meed of merit, deathless fame.

Yes, there are eyes that watch to-night,
  And gentle lips that fondly move
In prayer, that, with the morning's light,
  May come the dear ones whom they love.

And to each brave and loving heart
  In fond embrace shall soon be pressed,
Never again from her to part,
  The maid of all beloved the best.

Then softly blow, thou evening breeze,
  And gently fill the grateful sails;
Waft the barque onward o'er the seas,
  Till night is gone and morn prevails;

Until the first faint beams of day
  Shall tinge the East with purple hues,
And the glad Sun, with golden ray,
  Shall genial warmth and light diffuse.

"Oh, Coralie!" with joyful voice
  The Chieftain cried: "from perils free,
How doth this heart again rejoice
  At thought of once more seeing thee!

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"Of folding thee within these arms,
Of kissing from thine eyes the tears,
And calming all thy fond alarms,
Thine anxious doubts and tender fears

"For him once more to thee restored;
Then at the altar's steps shall kneel
Thy loving and beloved lord,
His and thine own true love to seal.

"Then raise," he cried, "the song of love,
Affection's fondest, sweetest lay,
And while we o'er the waters rove
We'll chase the glooms of night away."

Then softly rose with one accord,
Some song that Sappho loved of old;
Each burning thought, and melting word,
In passion's fondest language told.

Mid story, song, and jovial mirth,
The hours of night sped swiftly on,
Till heralded the coming birth
Of the glad day, the approaching Sun.

And soon, in radiant majesty,
From out the waters of the deep,
The Day-God rose resplendently,
To wake the dreaming world from sleep.

The Chief leaned o'er the vessel's side,
And eager bent his wistful eye
Where, o'er the far-off swelling tide,
The mountains reared their forms on high.

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"Welcome, my native land, once more!"
He rapturous cried: "soon shall these feet
Tread once again their native shore,
And these fond, anxious eyes shall greet

"Full many a cherished form; and pressed
Within these loving arms shall be
One dearer far than all the rest,
My own, my peerless Coralie!"

And as he fondly said, and gazed,
Slow rising through the waters green,
Her loving eyes to his upraised,
The Mermaid's glowing form was seen.

Up through the waves she slowly came,
Her form as soft, her glance as bright,
Her charms as fair, her smile the same,
As when she first did greet his sight.

Ah, how could mortal man withstand
The beauty of that radiant face,
The whiteness of that snowy hand,
And that fair form of matchless grace!

Yet, all unmoved, the Chieftain stood;
Each melting glance of that bright eye
Of the fair maiden of the flood,
Glanced from his heart all harmless by.

That heart in love's dear chain was bound,
She powerless its links to break;
No echo in its depths she found,
Nor soft emotion could awake.

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And on the Chief she fondly gazed;
  Then, with her snowy hand, aloft
A bright and glittering ring she raised,
  And said, in accents sweetly soft:

"Behold the pledge thou gav'st to me,—
  The diamond ring, with which to bind
Thy love to me, and mine to thee,—
  With which thy vow I call to mind,

"And its fulfillment claim of thee:
  Remember, thou hast given thy word
To dwell with me beneath the sea,
  And be mine own true, loving lord."

"Nay, never with thee will I go,"
  The Chief replied, "thou water sprite,
To the dark caverns deep below,
  From glorious day to endless night.

"Thy love I scorn; my pledge I break;
  Think'st thou my firm resolve to move?
Yes, know for one dear maiden's sake,
  I scorn thee, and thy proffered love."

Sadly she smiled. "'Tis well," she said:
  "Take back the ring thou gav'st to me,
And with it that fair maiden wed,
  Who is of all so dear to thee.

"I would not have thy hand alone,
  If not thy love went with it too;
Think'st thou I'd prize a heart of stone,
  While to another it was true?

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"I do release thee from thy vow,
Here, in the presence of thy band;"
Then, with the ring, she neared the prow,
To place it on the Chieftain's hand.

She took his hand, and with her own,
So icy cold, so soft and fair,
She placed thereon the glittering stone,
And yet her hand still lingered there,

As if reluctant 'twas to free
Its hold of his; then quickly round
His trembling hand, all suddenly,
Her dripping fingers close she wound.

A wild, exultant laugh she gave;
Then looked into the Chieftain's face,
Pale as some spirit from the grave,
Which e'en of life scarce gave a trace,

As if the damps of that cold touch
Had pierced into his very soul,
And left him by its icy clutch
O'er mind and limb without control.

Wildly she laughed,—a harsh and weird,
Discordant laugh, which caused to bound
With fear the hearts of those who heard,
So dread, unearthly was the sound;

Then with a tone triumphant cried,
"There is no power can ever part
From thee thine own true, loving bride,
Or take from me thy loving heart!"

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One struggle, then, the Chief essayed,
To tear from that cold, ruthless grasp,
His hand, but vain the effort made:
Her own round his doth tighter clasp.

Then o'er the prow the Chieftain bends,
And with a wild and frantic leap
Swift from the vessel's side descends
On to the bosom of the deep;

And round her form his arms she binds
As they glide o'er the foamy waves;
Then round his form her own she winds,
And, plunging, seeks the coral caves.

In wild despair the Chieftain cried;
Vainly he struggles to get free,
As through the dark and swelling tide
Downward they go all rapidly.

And as he sank each frenzied word
Came fainter from the murmuring sea,
And the last words they faintly heard
Were these: "Farewell, lost Coralie!"

Down through the waters swift they go,
Down to the caves of amber bright,
Where tides of purest crystal flow
Through beauteous realms of pearly light;

Where the sea-serpent's form is seen,
And his red eyes all fiery glow;
Far down beneath the waters green,
A thousand fathoms deep below.

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Hon. Charles Sumner,
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Safely the vessel reached the shore,
And loving hearts beat free and glad;
Yet one, alas! shall come no more,—
One heart alone is dark and sad.

And when with trembling lips they tell
To her her lover's mournful fate,—
The fearful doom the Chief befell,—
As the sad story they relate,

Wild agony that heart assails,
And day and night, in hopeless grief,
Her lover lost the maid bewails;
Naught can console, or give relief.

Yes, long shalt thou with tears deplore
The fate of him, thy vanished lord;
To thee the chief shall come no more,
No more to thee shall be restored.

Each morn shalt thou look forth to sea,
And vainly scan the distant main;
For false thy every hope must be
Of him who ne'er shall come again.

And ever with each eve's return,
In lonely wanderings by the sea,
Shalt thou with ceaseless sorrow mourn
Thine own lost love, sweet Coralie.

END.

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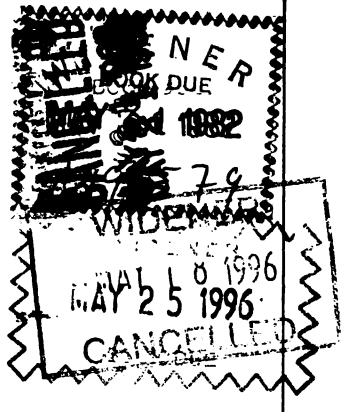

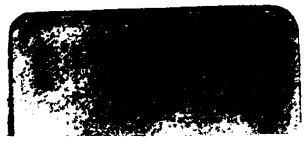

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